

SECTION 3.11: RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

This section discusses the potential effects that the alternatives considered in Chapter 2 would have on the recreational resources within the DMC Unit. Information in this section is summarized from the Draft CVPIA PEIS, Recreation, Technical Appendix, Volume 4 (Reclamation 1997c).

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Recreation sites that could be affected by the renewal of long-term water service contract in the DMC Unit include San Luis Reservoir, the O'Neill Forebay, Pacheco State Park, the San Joaquin River, and various wildlife refuges and areas located near the DMC Unit. The Delta-Mendota Canal itself also provides limited recreational opportunities and, therefore, is treated as a potentially affected recreational area.

RESERVOIRS

San Luis Reservoir and the adjacent O'Neill Forebay provide reservoir-related recreational resources in the vicinity of the service areas of the DMC Unit contractors. The reservoirs are located west of Interstate 5 near State Route 152. They are within the San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area, operated by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR). Visitor attendance to the San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area in fiscal year 2001 and 2002 was 514,096 (California Department of Parks and Recreation 2004). This included 469,478 day-users and 44,618 campers.

San Luis Reservoir

When it is full, San Luis Reservoir covers approximately 12,700 surface acres. Recreational activities include boating, water-skiing, fishing, picnicking, camping, hunting, and hiking. Reservoir facilities consist of one campground and two concrete boat ramps and boarding docks. The reservoir has no designated swimming or lakeside beach areas. Boat and shore fishing occur throughout San Luis Reservoir. Migratory waterfowl hunting is permitted on most of the reservoir. Hunting for deer and wild pig is also allowed on the northwest shoreline of the San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area.

Water-enhanced activities account for the largest portion of reservoir use. Relaxing and camping are the most popular of the water-related activities. Seventy-seven percent of annual use occurs between April and September. Recreation at the reservoir is optimized at a pool elevation 544 feet above mean sea level. Use of the two boat ramps becomes impaired between 340 and 360 feet above mean sea level. Swimming activities are

unaffected by reservoir surface water fluctuations because the reservoir has no designated swimming facilities.

San Luis Reservoir and Los Banos Creek State Recreation Area Joint General Plan and Resource Management Plan

Reclamation, in cooperation with the CDPR, is preparing draft environmental documentation for the San Luis Reservoir and Los Banos Creek State Recreation Area Joint General Plan and Resource Management Plan (Fed. Reg 68:26:6509–6510).

San Luis Reservoir is approximately five miles west of the city of Los Banos, adjacent to State Route 152, in Merced County, California. Los Banos Creek State Recreation Area is located about five miles southwest of the city of Los Banos, south of State Route 152 and just west of Interstate 5. Reclamation, the NEPA lead agency, and CDPR, the CEQA lead agency, are preparing a joint draft programmatic environmental impact statement/report, which is due in March 2005. The purpose of the general plan is to guide future development activities and management objectives at the recreation area. CDPR is preparing the general plan portion and Reclamation is developing the resource management plan of the combined document. Reclamation and CDPR are cooperating to prepare the joint plans in a consolidated planning process to solicit agency and stakeholder participation for both efforts simultaneously. The project areas for each plan will vary, based on differences in management and ownership; however, there will be common components within the joint plans.

The San Luis Reservoir and the Los Banos Creek Retention Dam were built in 1965 as part of the CVP on lands owned by Reclamation. The lands are jointly managed by DWR and CDPR. CDPR is responsible for recreation and resource management while DWR manages the water supply facilities. The CDFG manages additional tracts of land in the vicinity of the San Luis Reservoir that were set aside to mitigate for construction impacts. These DFG-managed lands will not be part of the general plan or the environmental documents because the CDPR does not have management jurisdiction over these lands. The San Luis Reservoir and O'Neill Forebay Wildlife Areas, federally owned lands managed by the CDFG, will be included in the resource management plan and the environmental documentation.

The objectives of the joint plans are to establish management objectives, guidelines, and actions to be implemented by Reclamation directly or through its recreation contract with CDPR to:

- Protect the water supply and water quality functions of the reservoirs.

- Protect and enhance natural and cultural resources in the state recreation area, consistent with federal law and Reclamation policies.
- Provide recreational opportunities and facilities consistent with the CVP purposes

The joint plans will be the primary management guideline for defining a framework for resource stewardship, interpretation, facilities, visitor use, and services. The joint plans will define an ultimate purpose, vision, and intent for management through goal statements, guidelines, and broad objectives. They will be long-term plans that will guide future specific actions at the state recreation area. Subsequent specific actions will be the subject of future environmental analysis as required.

O'Neill Forebay

The O'Neill Forebay is located immediately east of San Luis Reservoir and 2.5 miles downstream of the San Luis Dam. The O'Neill Forebay covers about 2,250 acres of surface area and 14 miles of shoreline and was developed in part to accommodate recreational use that may be lost when San Luis Reservoir is drawn down. Recreational facilities consist of two boat ramps, two picnic areas, a campground, and a swimming area. O'Neill Forebay recreational features also include the Medeiros recreation area, which provides picnicking, camping, and boat ramp access, and the San Luis Creek day-use area, which provides picnicking, swimming, and boat ramp access. Facilities accommodate boating, fishing, swimming, wading, camping, and sightseeing. In addition, the O'Neill Forebay is nationally known for windsurfing.

The recreational facilities at O'Neill Forebay provide more diverse recreational opportunities than those at San Luis Reservoir. The most popular activities are swimming, wading, and relaxing. The majority of visits occur between April and September. Visitor origins include San Luis Reservoir, including coastal and bay counties to the west, and valley and foothill counties to the east.

Recreational use at O'Neill Forebay is generally unaffected by water level fluctuations because pool elevations are usually maintained at constant levels. However, minor drops in surface elevation may affect beach use because a relatively large amount of the shoreline would be exposed.

PACHECO STATE PARK

Pacheco State Park is adjacent to the San Luis Reservoir to the west. Because Paula Fatjo, a direct descendant of Francisco Pacheco for whom Pacheco Pass is named, wanted her ranch, El Rancho San Luis Gonzaga, to be kept intact for the enjoyment of people who shared her love of horses and the beauty of the unspoiled land itself, she donated the

parklands to the State of California. Pacheco State Park has beautiful displays of spring wildflowers, scenic vistas, and excellent hiking, mountain biking, and horse trails. The 28 miles of designated trails offers several loop options to give visitors the choice of a hike or ride from one to 20 miles or more. Visitors on the park's trails can enjoy beautiful views of the San Luis Reservoir and the San Joaquin Valley and, in the spring, blossoming wildflowers. Pacheco State Park is home to tule elk, deer, bobcat, coyote, fox, hawks, eagles, and a variety of smaller animals. Among the historic features of the park are an old line shack used by Henry Miller's cattle company in the late 1800s and part of the old Butterfield stage line route.

Only the western 2,600 acres are currently open for public use. The eastern portion of the park that adjoins San Luis Reservoir remains closed to the public until additional trail systems have been developed and the safety concerns associated with a wind turbine farm can be addressed.

SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

The San Joaquin River is approximately 100 miles long and extends from Millerton Lake to the Delta. Table 3.11-1 lists some of the recreational facilities and activities located on the San Joaquin River near the DMC Unit.

Recreational use estimates for the 100 miles of the lower San Joaquin River are not available. However, based on information provided by recreation sites on the river, boating and fishing activities are estimated to total about 157,000 six-hour recreation visitor-days (California Department of Parks and Recreation 1990). Most of the San Joaquin River visitors are assumed to originate from nearby counties.

Recreational use on the San Joaquin River has been substantially affected by operation of Millerton Lake and diversions from the Merced and Chowchilla Canals east of the Mendota Pool. The San Joaquin River flow is somewhat intermittent downstream of the Mendota Pool to the Merced River confluence, with flows fed mainly by irrigation return flows.

**Table 3.11-1
San Joaquin River Recreational Facilities and Activities
near the Delta-Mendota Canal Unit**

San Joaquin River Locations	Facilities and Activities
Millerton Lake to Merced County line near State Route 152	No major public recreation features; public access at several road and state highway crossings
Merced County	San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Fremont Ford State Recreation Area
Stanislaus County	Las Palmas fishing access site Laird County Park Numerous public access points
San Joaquin County	Durham Ferry State Recreation Area Mossville Landing County Park Dos Reis County Park Numerous public road crossings

DELTA-MENDOTA CANAL

Fishing access to the Delta-Mendota Canal is provided at Delta-Mendota Canal Site 2A in Stanislaus County and Delta-Mendota Canal Site 5 in Fresno County. Both sites provide parking areas and restrooms (Reclamation 1992). Fishing access to the Delta-Mendota Canal is limited to the developed access points (Reclamation 1993). Fishing is the only recreational activity allowed at both access sites.

Fishing use at the two sites has been estimated at 23,000 visitor-days (Reclamation 1997c). Canal Site 5 accounted for approximately 99 percent of this total in 1991. An estimated 85 percent of the visitors to the fishing sites originate in the local area (Reclamation 1981). Because no water-contact activities are allowed on the canal, fluctuations in the water level or flow do not directly affect recreational opportunities.

WILDLIFE REFUGES

Wildlife refuges in the vicinity of the Delta-Mendota Canal service area include the San Luis and Kesterson National Wildlife Refuges; the Mendota, Merced, San Luis National, San Joaquin National, Volta, Los Banos, and North Grasslands (Salt Slough and China Island) Wildlife Management Areas; Upper and Lower Cottonwood Wildlife Areas; Action Plan Lands (Freitis and West Bear Creek); and the Grassland Resource Conservation District. The Wildlife Management Areas listed above are discussed in more detail in Section 3.9, Biological Resources.

PRIVATE HUNTING CLUBS

The 176 private waterfowl hunting clubs in the San Joaquin River Region cover about 96,800 acres. About 33,900 acres are flooded annually. Waterfowl hunting activity was estimated at 241,000 hunter-days in 1992.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Impacts to recreational resources would be considered adverse if they result in a decline in the quality or quantity of recreational facilities or services, exceed adopted state or local recreation planning standards, or involve the installation of new facilities that could adversely impact the recreational environment.

NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

San Luis Reservoir could be affected by water level fluctuations during one or more dry or wet years. Boating would be constrained and shoreline activities would decline for two or more peak-season months as compared to the Affected Environment. During consecutive wet years, boat ramps would be unusable for one more peak-season month, boating would

be constrained, and shoreline activities would decline for two more peak-season months and one more off-season month. Additional use could decrease about 1 percent during dry years and about 4 percent during wet years.

Because pool elevations in O'Neill Forebay are maintained at constant levels, water level fluctuations would not be affected. Increased stream flows on the San Joaquin River could increase recreational opportunities. Recreational opportunities provided by the Delta-Mendota Canal are expected to be similar to No-Action Alternative conditions because water levels in the canal are held constant. Wildlife refuges will receive increased water supplies as a result of Level 2 refuge water supplies, thereby maintaining refuge recreational opportunities at current or enhanced levels, especially for wildlife observation activities.

ALTERNATIVE 1

Similar to the discussion above for the No-Action Alternative, Alternative 1 would not result in adverse impacts on recreational resources. The facilities would continue to operate as in the past. Recreational opportunities and annual use levels at the O'Neill Forebay, San Joaquin River, Delta-Mendota Canal, and wildlife refuges are not expected to change from current conditions as a result of long-term contract renewals.

ALTERNATIVE 2

Similar to the discussion above for the No-Action Alternative, Alternative 2 would not result in adverse impacts on recreational resources. The facilities would continue to operate as in the past. Recreational opportunities and annual use levels at the O'Neill Forebay, San Joaquin River, Delta-Mendota Canal, and wildlife refuges are not expected to change from current conditions as a result of long-term contract renewals.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Long-term contract renewals, when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, will not cause or contribute to impacts to recreational opportunities or resources. Contract renewals call for the same quantities of water to be delivered to the same lands, with no additional facility modifications or construction. Water storage and conveyance facilities that provide recreational opportunities will not be incrementally affected by long-term contract renewals; reductions in water surface elevations are attributable to other operational decisions independent of the renewal of long-term water service and repayment contracts.